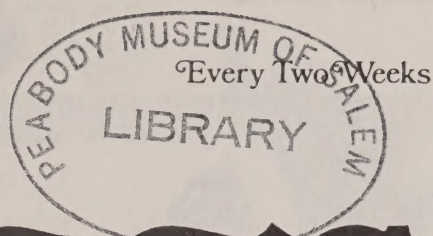




messing about in BOATS



VOLUME 1-NUMBER 1

May 15, 1983





messing about in BOATS

PUBLISHED EVERY TWO WEEKS, 24
ISSUES PER YEAR, NOT PUBLISHED
DURING THE MONTH OF AUGUST.

SUBSCRIPTION: \$15 FOR 24 ISSUES.
PREPAID ONLY.

ADDRESS: 29 BURLEY ST.
WENHAM, MA 01984
TEL. (617) 774-0906

PUBLISHER & EDITOR: BOB HICKS

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TING YOUR MONEY'S WORTH, LET
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Our Next Issue

... will be in the mail the third week of
May. If your subscription order is re-
ceived here before May 15th you'll get
our second issue. Sample mailing of the
second issue will go to a different list
than this first issue did. Subscribe now
to be with us from the beginning!

"Dynamite" Payson

... has recently finished off the first
of what might be his next "Instant Boat"
and he's also got a new book in the works.
Enjoy a visit with us to his shop down in
South Thomaston, ME.

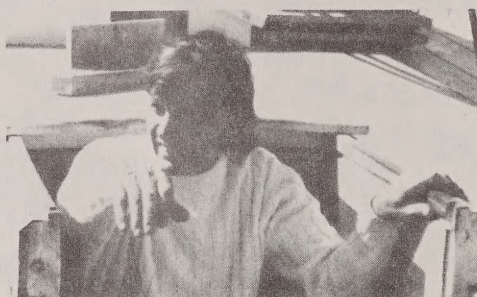
Gunkholing on the Lower Connecticut

... may not seem an attractive idea
what with all those marinas around, but
Ben Fuller took us on a rowing excu-
sion into a saltmarsh area that was very
enjoyable.

Spirit of Massachusetts

... is a two masted schooner under
construction at the New England Historic
Seaport in Charlestown, MA. We attend-
ed the laying of the keel on April 16th.

Commentary



BOB HICKS

Well, yes, who needs another boat-
ing publication? I mean, there are dozens
already on the newstands that cater to
just about any possible boating enthusi-
asm. I know, I've read them all over
the past seven years I've been in boating.
But, I decided something still was mis-
sing. Only two of those magazines really
reached my interests and they come out
only six times a year, once every two
months. WOODEN BOAT and SMALL
BOAT JOURNAL, nice magazines indeed,
but it's so long between issues that I
nearly forget that I get them.

WOODEN BOAT and SMALL BOAT
JOURNAL? Yes, that should indicate to
you where my interests lie, but let me
elaborate a bit. I like wooden boats. I
like sailing wooden boats. I like rowing
wooden boats. I like restoring and build-
ing wooden boats. I also like old one
luger motor launches and mahogany
speedboats. I've found wood/canvas can-
oes fascinating. I like the idea of coastal
cruising in small boats. I think steam-
boats are great. I'm not a purist about
wooden boats I just prefer wood to use
and work on.

So, OK, this means that WOODEN
BOAT and SMALL BOAT JOURNAL
should do the trick for me. But, as I
said, there's that time lag thing. And
there's one other really important as-
pect. Both are aiming at "national"
readerships, and thus cannot focus on
the local New England scene as much as
I'd like to see them. There are hundreds
of local stories that just cannot get into
print because of the space and time con-
straints imposed by the size of these
two publications, frequency of publication
and nationwide focus.

So I decided for the third time in
my life that I'd get into publishing a re-
gional publication in which I could tell
the many, many tales of regional inter-
est about the sorts of boats I like and
the people I've met doing interesting
things with these boats. All that is going
on here in New England that cannot hope
for more than cursory mention in the
major publications, or belated cover-
age several months after the event.
Yes, since 1959 I have supported myself
with small regional magazines, two of
them, so I'm no stranger to the econom-
ics and mechanics of getting out this
paper you are reading now.

The format I've chosen is this 12
to 16 page "bulletin" type, this intro-
ductory issue contains the sort of mix
of news, features and classified ads I
expect to provide. It has no trade ads
yet, of course, but when those who think
the readership we attract is a market
for their products or services I expect
you'll be seeing some ads.

The key thing is this. You will get
a copy EVERY TWO WEEKS, except in
August when we'll not publish. In August
everyone is out in their boats, and I'll
be too. But, save for then, you'll hear
from us every two weeks. This means
that information about upcoming activi-
ties will be current, and that reports on
bygone events will be topical and up to
date. And, the classifieds. You can get
an ad out to potential buyers within any
two week period. None of this 6 weeks
to three months stuff. And the ads are
cheap at 10¢ a word, even cheaper for
any subscriber because a subscriber can
have a FREE classified in any issue.
Along with enjoying boats another thing I
like is the buying, selling and swap-
ping. I wanted a current, frequent mark-
etplace for this. So I'm providing it.

The contents will reflect my inter-
ests but I'll not close my mind to other
boating subjects that readers may sug-
gest as long as they fit into this sort of
home town paper format. I'm not going
into any of the how-to stuff you can get
from WOODEN BOAT or SMALL BOAT
JOURNAL, other than when it comes with
an article on how someone interesting did
something interesting. I'm also not too
interested in serious racing or in trade
promotion items. I am interested in what
the everyday boating nut is doing in this
fascinating field.

In April of 1970 I started publishing
my second regional publication I aimed
at local people and local activities. One
of the first subscribers wrote that he
was subscribing, but he figured I'd run
out of things to print within the year.
Now I'm in my 14th year working on
issue number 156. That reader is still
with me. It'll take time of course for
MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS to build up
that sort of score but it will, it will. I
hope you'll be with us through the coming
years.

What's happening...

APRIL 29: ESSEX SHIPBUILDING MUSEUM, ESSEX, MASS.

Remembrances of Essex and the Fisherman's Cup Races, Ford vs. Bluenose. Evers Burtner, professor emeritus of naval architecture at MIT and a member of the Fisherman's Cup race committee will reminisce on the excitement of these international fisherman's races. Program starts at 7:30 p.m. at the Museum on Rt. 133 in Essex village. For additional information, contact Betsy Madsen at (617) 768-7797.

MAY 5: PEABODY MUSEUM, SALEM, MASS.

Regular monthly meeting of the Traditional Small Craft Association of the Cape & Islands. Dana Story of Essex will present his talk on the days of shipbuilding in Essex stretching back over 200 years. The Story yard is the last remaining shipbuilder from that era. Program starts at 7:30 p.m. in the education room of the Museum, just off East India Square in downtown Salem. For additional information call Bob Hicks at (617) 774-0906.

CALENDAR

MAY 21 & 22: CHESTER A. CROSBY & SONS, OSTERVILLE, MA.

Spring in-the-water meet of the Traditional Small Craft Association of the Cape & Islands. Saturday from 9 a.m. will be messing about in boats, bring your own sail or oar powered craft or enjoy trying out those of others present. Saturday evening potluck supper followed by an evening program emphasizing the role of the amateur boatbuilder. Speakers will be Ron Ginger, George Kelly and Dr. John Roche of the TS&A. Sunday morning those interested will enjoy a cruise of the bay at Osterville. For additional information contact John Burke at (617) 771-8442.

MAY 28: MYSTIC SEAPORT, MYSTIC, CONN.

Seventh Annual Howard Blackburn Memorial Dory Races. Dory races in the Museum's 18 ft Banks dories for two man teams around a half mile three-legged course starting and finishing at Chubb's Wharf at the Seaport. Separate classes for novices and experts. Skippers' meeting is at noon followed by elimination heats of four dories each leading to a final in each class.

In 1982 forty teams competed in this event commemorating the heroic ordeal of doryman Howard Blackburn who rowed for five days through a blizzard to reach land after he was separated from his schooner on the Grand Banks in 1893.

Two-person teams are invited to take part, interested persons should contact Peter Vermilya at Mystic Seaport, Mystic, CT 06355. (203) 572-0711.

MAY 29: WOODEN BOAT SCHOOL, BROOKLIN, ME.

The 1983 session of the Wooden Boat School organized by WOODEN BOAT magazine gets underway. It will run until September 16th and offer a wide variety of courses (see our story on the 1982 sailmaking course in this issue). The initial course beginning May 29th is on theory and practice of boatbuilding taught by Arno Day.

Advance registration is required and the more popular courses fill up quickly so act fast if you're interested. For a brochure with full details on the twenty or more course offered this year, write to Peter Anderheggen, The Wooden Boat School, P.O. Box 78, Brooklin, ME 04616.

JUNE 4 & 5: MYSTIC SEAPORT SMALL CRAFT MEET.

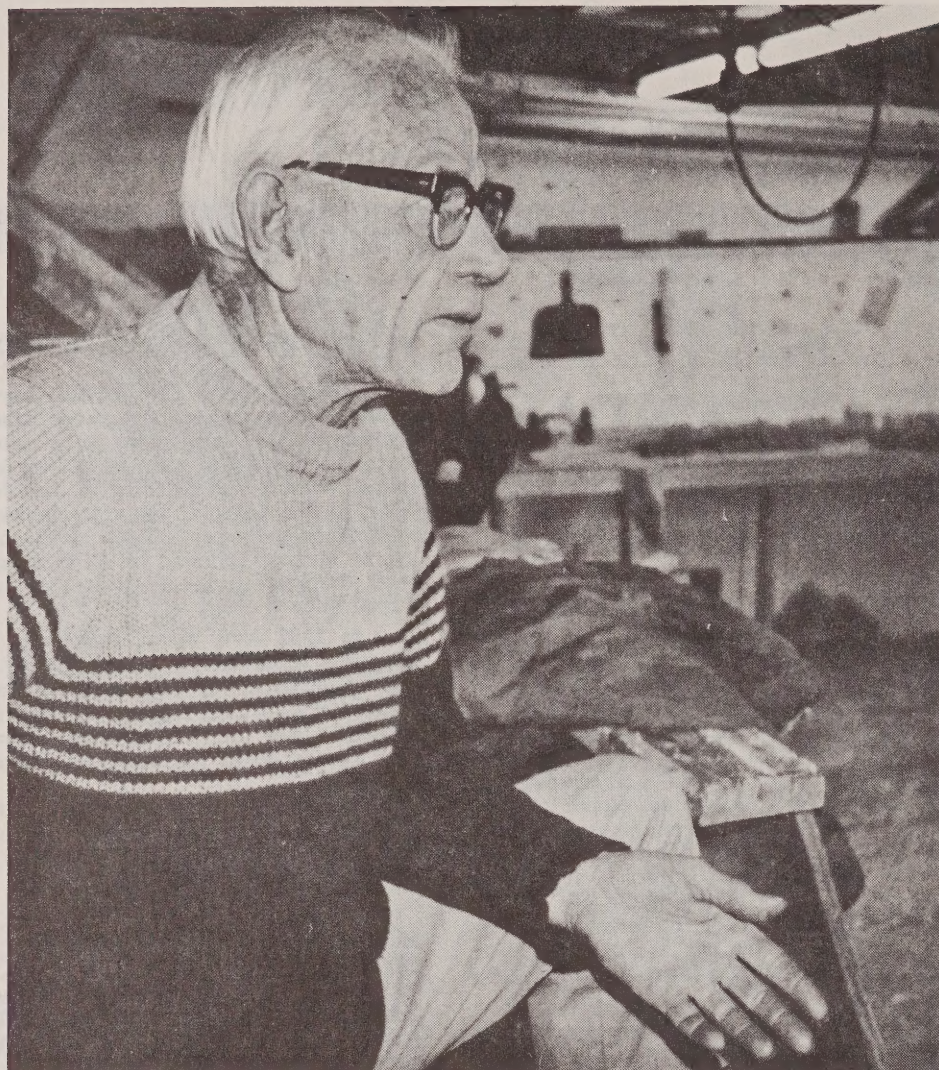
The annual gathering of hundreds of traditional small craft enthusiasts at Mystic Seaport Museum. The 1983 program has not yet been published (April 5th) but if you are interested in learning more and are not on the Museum's mailing list from prior attendance, contact the Curatorial Dept. Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, CT 06355 and request information on the Small Craft Meet. We'll have more details in an upcoming issue.

DOING SOMETHING INTERESTING IN BOATS? KNOW SOMEONE WHO IS? IF SO, LET US KNOW, WE'LL GET YOUR NEWS ITEM PUBLISHED RIGHT HERE ON THIS PAGE. WRITE US AT BOATS, 29 BURLEY ST. WENHAM, MA 01984.



Seen
at the
Boston
Boat
Show

Amongst all the gleaming plastic and chrome at the Bayside Expo Center were three small wooden boat displays. The top photo is Bill Clements of Billerica displaying a Rushton Princess sailing canoe just completed for a customer. The center photo is Mr. & Mrs. Jim Odell with some of their Lowell's Boat Shop boats. And the bottom photo is of Hank Tart with some of his Good Wooden Boats from Maine, products of several down east builders.



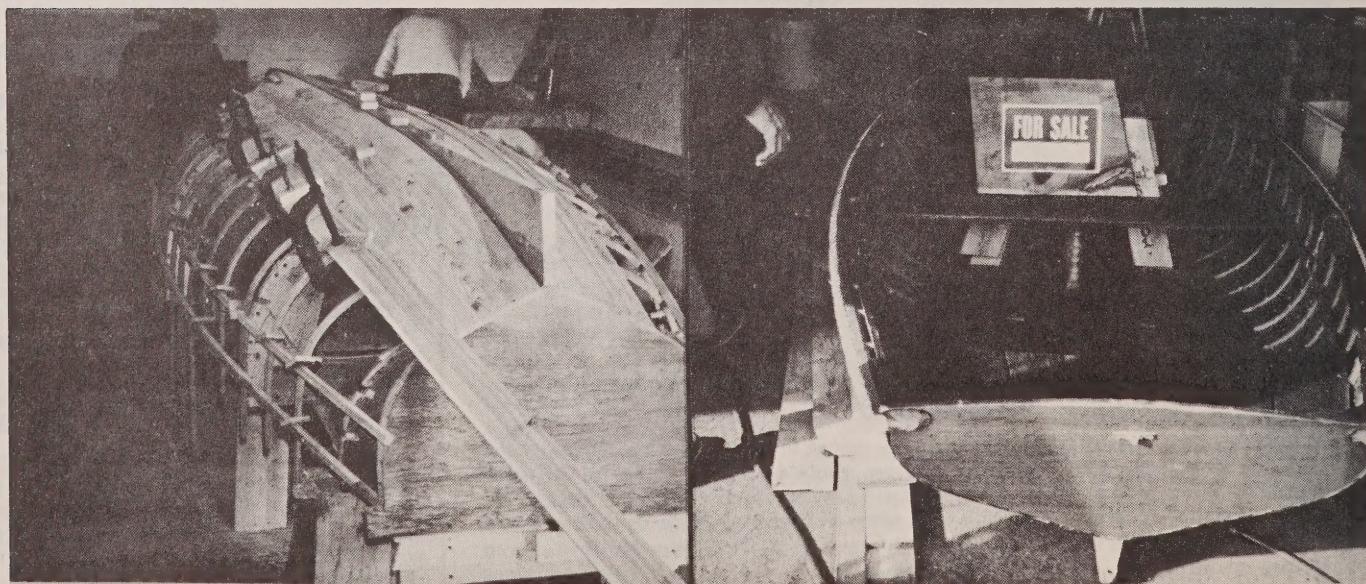
Above: Loring expounds on his love of boatbuilding. Below: Learning to build is the purpose of Phoenix, but the resulting boats have to be marketed to meet costs.

"The thing you have to remember about this operation is that the boats we build are just a byproduct." And, Loring Wordell has quite a collection of "byproducts" now from his Phoenix Boatshop Cooperative in Hyannis, Massachusetts. About a dozen right now. Stashed in his garage, under cover in rented space, they keep piling up faster than he can sell them off. "Last year was our busiest yet," Loring comments, "We built 15 boats in '82, with nine of us working in the shop."

Well, if Loring had more time, maybe he'd get around to merchandising the byproducts of the Phoenix Boatshop Cooperative, but he's busy all day, 8 to 5, Monday through Friday, teaching his apprentices wooden boatbuilding, then he tackles the paperwork evenings, answering all the inquiries his ads attract. The Phoenix Boatshop Cooperative is a boatbuilding school, in effect, if not in actuality. People who want to learn about wooden boatbuilding pay \$3000 into the Cooperative for a nine month session under the tutelage of Loring, building a boat. It's not tuition, exactly, because running a "school" in Massachusetts gets into some pretty heavy bureaucratic paperwork, credentials, accreditation, all that sort of thing. Loring just wants to help people who want to learn boatbuilding, and somehow support himself so doing. 1983 is his 6th year and he's still at it with unflagging enthusiasm.

"It's a hell of a location, isn't it?" he asks rhetorically, as we stand outside the shop, one wide bay in a long row building, one of those steel frame things covered with corrugated metal, and lined with overhead doors all facing the street across narrow front yards. Up and down the street in this industrial park are all sorts of small entrepreneurs mostly into automotive stuff. Machine shops, body shops, restoration shops. And amongst all this mechanical America

Phoenix Boatshop Cooperative Where the Boats are a Byproduct



is wooden boatbuilding. The romantic illusion we amateurs hold of boatshops at the water's edge shatters most of the time on the shoals of the cost of owning or renting shorefront land. And so the builders are back in the woods, or in the industrial park.

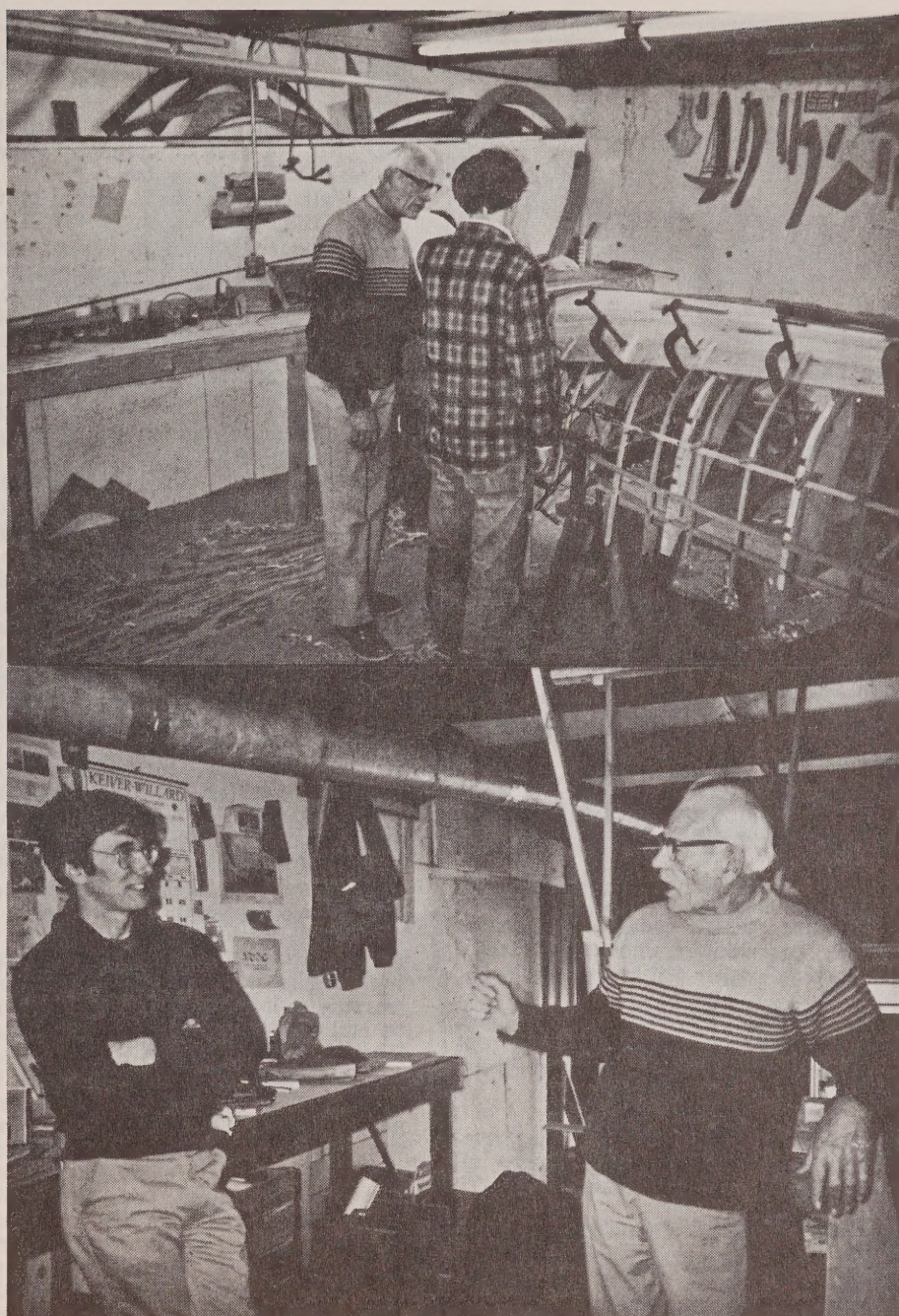
Loring's section of this row building has room inside for a two story set-up, the front half is full height, the back has a "loft", beneath which is the pile of wood. The boats under construction are set up on molds upstairs, move down for finishing off when they come off the molds. Loring sticks to small craft for several reasons, one being the space limitations just described.

Another is his conviction that any apprentice can learn most of what he will need to know building a small boat if it's not something simple. And so, the boats that get built from year to year vary a lot in size, type, and complexity. Right now it's hard times. Loring is left with just two of the four apprentices who signed on last fall. There are four boats in the shop. "Susan" is an 11 foot flat bottom skiff finished off as a yacht tender, and she is finished. Then there are two of "Victoria", an 11 foot lapstrake round bottom yacht tender of Herreshof design. One is off the mold and awaiting finishing out, the other is partly planked up. And finally, there's an 18 foot Rangeley being built lapstrake, only the garboards and one or two lower strakes are on. The builder, one of the two apprentices who had to go, was sent home to Canada by the U.S. Customs and Immigration people in a hassle over his immigrant status in the good old U.S. "I don't know yet just what we'll do with that one," Loring muses, but it is taking up space which will be needed come next September and another group of apprentices.

One of those prospects happened to be at the shop during our visit. Chris Ryan builds houses in western Massachusetts, old time post and beam types. Now he thinks he'd like to learn to build boats. Loring was giving him the straight goods on how it would happen. Loring doesn't have a sales "pitch", he just tells it like it is. The guys (and girls) who have signed on and paid their money knew what it was going to be and weren't disappointed or disillusioned later on.

Peter Schwamb was working on the partly planked Victoria. He's an antique restorer, and runs his own business locally after hours at the "shop." He's enthused about all he has learned, and contemplates applying his knowledge to building ship models that would compliment his antique restoration work. Even models in bottles.

"We always manage to finish at least one boat for each apprentice in each session," Loren explains. The four boats now on hand in various stages work out for the four apprentices who began the year. Aside from the Rangeley which had to be abandoned by the Canadian, they'll all be done by the end of May. The other missing student is a merchant mariner and had only six months off. He'll be back to finish up his remaining three months next fall. Loring



Top: Loring discusses planking work on the Victoria with Philip Rice, who, along with Peter Schwamb, comprise the 1982-83 group. Bottom: Chris Ryan is interested in learning boatbuilding, perhaps in the fall of '83 group.

is flexible. "I even have an itinerant student I'm tutoring," he laughs. It seems a local fellow wanted to get involved but work pressure did not permit him to just take a year off, so he began building a boat at home, and calling on Loring frequently for "next step" guidance. Loring worked it out. "You realize, this year my gross income is \$9000," he asks, again rhetorically. "That's really GROSS!" Necessity is the mother of invention, hence the tutoring on the side.

So, who is Loring Wordell and just how did he end up teaching wooden boat building in Hyannis? Well, he's been around a while, talking about when, "I was back in my early fifties," but he's been running the Phoenix just the last six years. He came into it via a year

at an apprentice program out further on the Cape, Experience, Inc. that didn't survive the pressures of state mandated "accreditation" and all that. And he was there via a torturous path that had begun from unemployment leading him to the state employment agency where they were looking for "craftsmen" to staff the then soon to be opened area vocational school. When they found Loring qualified to teach boat building from his trade background, they said, "Mr. Wordell, you're in. Now, all you need to do is go to college and get your necessary educational credits." Swell. But, Loring did. Garnering his teaching certificate he then found the job was gone, filled. Now what?

The lady at the employment agency

Some Good Buys in Byproducts

10' SEMI DORY: Cedar plank and bottom, oak frames, inwales and rub rails, all fastenings copper and bronze. \$595.

8' SAILING SKIFF: Cedar plank, oak frames and rails, plywood bottom, all fastenings copper and bronze. Spruce spars, dacron sails, 36 sq. ft. completely rigged, ready to sail. \$695.

10' ROWING SKIFF: John Atkin design, flat bottom. Cedar plank and bottom, oak frames, inwales and rubrails, all fastenings copper and bronze. \$695.

11' FLAT BOTTOM SKIFF: Robert Steward design. \$795.

12' ROWING SKIFF: Asa Thompson design as modified by WOODEN BOAT magazine. Double cedar bottom, cedar plank, oak chine, frames and rails, all fastenings copper and bronze. \$795.

15' SAILING PEAPOD: Sprit rigged, lapstrake cedar plank, oak frames, copper and bronze clench nails and rivets. \$3295.

17' SWAMPSCOTT DORY: Sailing/rowing model. Cedar plank, oak frames, all copper and bronze fastenings. \$3495.

18' BAY BIRD KNOCKABOUT: Gaff rig, jib headed day sailer complete with sails and rigging. Carvel cedar plank, mahogany transom, oak frames, all copper and bronze fastenings. \$6700.

14' COTUIT SKIFF: White cedar bottom, mahogany plank and keel, oak frames, canvas deck, Sitka spruce spars, no sails. \$4200.

10' YACHT TENDER: Sprit rigged, daggerboard, flip-up rudder. Mahogany plank, oak frames. White exterior, all bright interior and sheer strake, nylon rope fender on rail. \$4900.

17' RANGELEY LAKE BOAT: Cedar plank, oak frames. Under construction. \$1750.

8' PLYWOOD PRAMS: Painted, \$385. Unpainted \$295.

11' YACHT TENDER: Rowing, \$1750. Sailing, \$2295.

PHOENIX BOATSHOP COOPERATIVE, P.O. Box 394, Hyannis, MA 02601. (617) 775-4890.

(state) said, "Why, Mr. Wordell, you are MOST unusually qualified." Really? This was interesting. "Yes, we have never had anyone qualified to teach boatbuilding. AND, we have an opening." Hence the year at Experience, Inc.

Well, Loring's been around boats all his life, back in World War II he was out moored off New Guinea, assigned to a merchantman, now awaiting, for weeks, unloading of war materiel. The crew sat on ship and baked in the tropic heat. Loring looked around, noted the wood scraps from crates, pallets, etc. and rounded up a crew to build a boat. They did, and sewed up bunk sheets into a sail. THEN they could get off ship and see New Guinea.

After the War Loring came to the Cape looking for work, and found a job and never left. He noticed local youths hanging about and organized them into a sort of once a week "building" club. They built all sorts of things out of wood scraps, toys, boats, games, furniture. It was then that Loring began to realize that he was a teacher. Today he has framed on a wall in his apartment a 1954 SATURDAY EVENING POST cover by Norman Rockwell, showing a bunch of teen age boys around a bench building boat models. It had been hung up on the coalbin wall back then by one of that group, and Loring rescued it recently in a fit of nostalgia. "Funny how all the signs were there then but I didn't see them," he comments.

Well, if you decide to learn how to build a boat at Phoenix, you began at the very beginning. Learning to read plans, learning to loft, lofting the boat you will be building, building the mold on which it will be built. About the molds. After a boat is done, the mold gets sawn up and burned in the stove. Even if the next guy is going to build that same boat. Only one mold has ever been saved, and that's for Bay Bird, Loring's own special love. (See sidebar article). You learn to use hand tools and power tools, you learn to choose stock, to choose fasteners. Loring takes you through everything. It takes nine months. You don't take the boat home with you. That's not as simple a situation as you might think.

Loring keeps the boats that are built. He intends to sell them to offset the overhead, the cost of the materials in them, the shop rent, heat, light, etc. If he gets around to it. "At first I had some apprentices express interest in buying the boat when they finished," Loring explains, "but then by May they look at it and don't see how they could get it home to Wisconsin in their VW bug." So they change their mind. One even expressed interest in buying the mold, he could dismantle it and take it home and then build another boat at home. "He picked out all the choice best stock and it was a beauty," Loring goes on, ruefully, "but then come May he decided not to take it when we got to figuring up the cost of the materials, and it just broke my heart to see all that good stuff go into the stove." So, Loring now just has a policy, he owns the boats. Until he sells them.

These are NICE boats. Most are

built by two man teams, while each individual ends up turning out a boat, he has actually shared in two with a fellow apprentice. "I used to try to organize a trip in June to the Mystic small craft meet with the finished boats and their builders," Loring tells. "But, that meant they had to stick around here after the winter rent went up June 1st for the summer people, and it also meant I hauled a pile of boats on van, trailer, etc. and then had to clean them all up afterwards. They weren't NEW anymore!" And so, no more Mystic trips. Loring still goes, and brings a boat, two years ago it was the lovely Bay Bird.

The boats are nice because they are byproducts. Loring uses the best, most suitable materials for whichever boats get chosen each year. Since he is trying to teach people the RIGHT way to build, they get built RIGHT. No shortcuts. He's not trying to market them as a professional boatbuilder. You might think, at first (I did) that the work of apprentice builders just wouldn't be up to a professional level, but it gets there by dint of time, time, time, and Loring's unceasing vigilance. Even with nine at work in '82 he kept up his standards. "That was busy, boy, keeping everyone going, keeping everything right," Loring figures ten his limit, he'd love it for financial reasons. The two guys left in the shop really like their setup. "We REALLY get personal attention," says Peter. Just because he's down to two, Loring doesn't back off, two guys are each getting five guy's time.

Loring figures they've built about 60 or so boats in six years, this is his slowest since he started. "Everyone is out working to live," he comments. Then he smiles. "Of course, I've got several of last year's group working now in boat building as a LIVING locally. Not just for fun, for real. So, over the years Loring has been selling off the byproducts, the present dozen or so are mostly leftover from '82. They range from an 8 foot sailing skiff to Bay Bird, an 18 foot knockabout. They're all for sale, but Loring kind of hints that he's not trying to hard to sell Bay Bird. "If I could sell the rest I wouldn't NEED to sell her," he explains. That's about the range in size, the biggest boat they have built was a 21 foot Swampscott dory.

Up in his apartment over the garage full of byproducts, Loring has the usual bookshelves full of boating books, and a whole lot of tubes of plans. "Plans, I love 'em," he says. "We're always getting new plans of traditional boats to choose from for each year's building." Along with the charts, the mail full of inquiries, the books, magazines, are four bulging albums of color photos of six years of Phoenix boatbuilding. He flips open one to a lovely Whitehall on the beach at sunset. The horizontal rays of the setting sun accentuate the gorgeous curves of the Whitehall's topsides, casting shadows that bring the shape of the boat almost into 3-D. "That's damn near erotic," Loring announces emphatically. Then, as an afterthought, he muses, "A woman built that one."

"Yes, Bay Bird's a beauty, and I'd just as soon not have to sell her," Loring Wordell has a hand resting on the lovely knockabout's hull in the garage. "That boat was SOME project and she has more gone into her than anything else we've done." Why? Because Loring had one for years and enjoyed many a fine time sailing her before he moved on. Nostalgia is involved.

He shakes a vellum drawing set out of a cardboard tube. "These here are her plans, the originals!" No, not from the 1920's designer, but from laboriously gathered dimensions taken off several semi-derelict Bay Birds Loring tracked down along the Massachusetts south shore. A folder disgorges all sorts of crude sketches, details, hull sections, rudder shapes, mast angle notations. Newspaper clippings show Bay Birds on the water. "Some boats were around, but no plans," he explains. "I went up to Salem to the Peabody Museum to look through their collection of Chamberlain and Starling Burgess plans but she wasn't there, though I had been given to understand she came from one of them."

All of Loring's research eventually was gathered together into the hands of one of the apprentices a couple of years back, who was a draftsman. He turned out a beautiful set of plans, from lines right on through complete construction details, to sail plan and rigging. "Talk about ego," Loring says, pointing at the box on each print where the draftsman signs his name. It was blank.

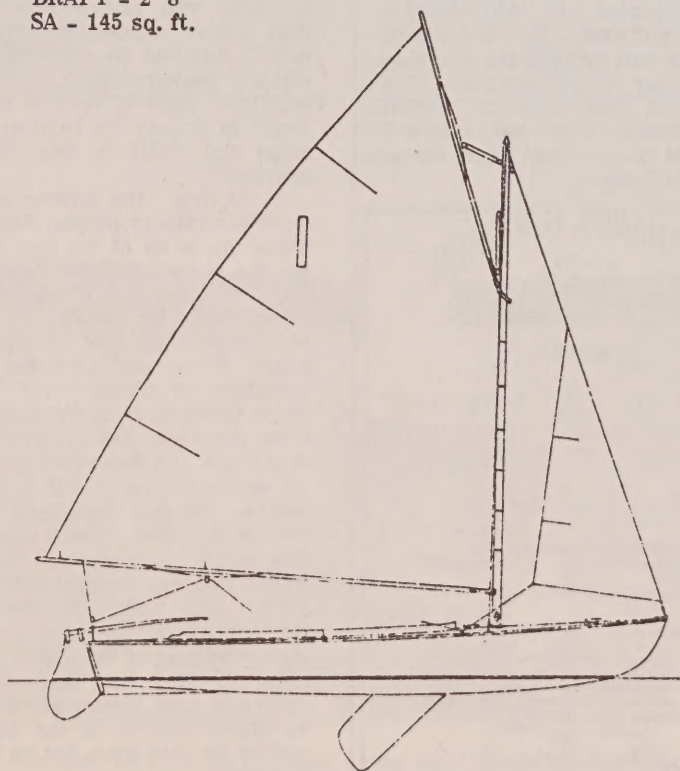
Bay Bird is 18 feet LOA, 16 feet LWL, 5 feet six inches maximum beam and draws 2 feet 8 inches with board down. She carries 145 square feet of sail in a gaff headed rig with a jib. "We've had more good times on Bay Bird," Loring reminisces. "We even took her offshore (his earlier one) to the Vinyard on a nice day," and he gets revved up as memories rush in. "We noticed it breezing up when we decided to head back (to Hyannis). Well it got some pretty steep little seas out there on the Sound, and every so often she'd lift her stern and rudder right clear of the water on a wave crest and we'd slew around and damn near broach before the rudder'd get a bite again. I got off that boat and my kneecaps were jumpin' up and down and I couldn't stop 'em." Adventures.

Bay Bird (today's) is finished off with white topsides, her sail is highlighted in red, and her interior is all bright finished. Low, flat and graceful, she's Loring Wordell's dreamboat (who remembers applying that term to girls back then?). If it happened that you came to look over Bay Bird and decided to offer Loring his asking price of \$6700, he just might decide to not accept your offer. It would depend on how many of the rest of the Phoenix Boatshop Co-operative's byproducts remained unsold at that time, probably.

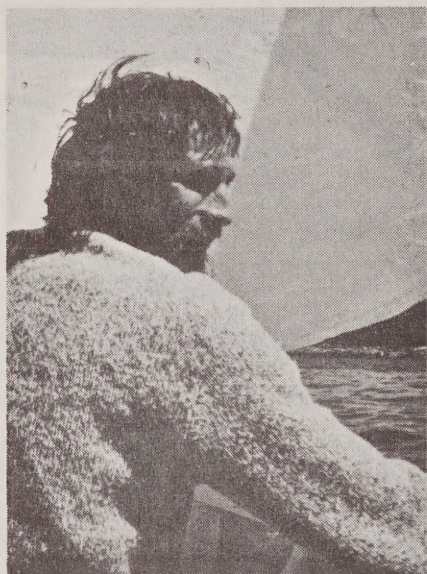


BAYBIRD

LOA - 18' 0"
BEAM - 5' 6"
LWL - 16' 0"
DRAFT - 2' 8"
SA - 145 sq. ft.



Why
is this
man smiling?



HE'S NAT WILSON, TRADITIONAL SAILMAKER FROM EAST BOOTHBAY, ME.

The sail that's driving the peapod in which he's sailing was built in one week by his fellow passenger, a novice who had never tried sailmaking before. Nat's smiling because he's never tried teaching sailmaking before, and this student's sail is working quite well. So did the other five 65 sq. ft. spritsails made during that week by the other five students. Six inexperienced (in sailmaking) unacquainted persons each successfully completed a sail made in the traditional manner under Nat's direction at the 1982 Wooden Boat School in Brooklin, ME. Nat should be pleased. I know for certain that the students were, because I was one of them.

NATHANIEL S. WILSON
SAILMAKER

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THE WOODENBOAT SCHOOL

Successful Sailmaking in Six Days

It was a hands-on sort of course, maybe two hours right at the beginning were devoted to some chalk and board diagramming. In this case, though, the "board" was the floor of Robin Lincoln's sail loft on the spacious, palatial grounds of WOODEN BOAT magazine in Brooklin, ME. Crouched around Nat as he bent over his chalk were six hopefuls who had shelled out \$250 a piece to learn the mysteries of sailmaking. Before noon on Monday, Nat was done with the lecturing, and we were on the floor with the chalk laying out three sailplans for a 65 sq. ft. spritsail. Initially we were working in teams, two to a sail, to do the cutting. After that, we'd each go on individually to sew together our own sails, install grommets, and rope the edges as was appropriate.

The class was truly representative of what this sort of "school" will attract. Two young women, both sailors, three middle aged (more or less) men, all also with sailing experience, one high school senior, likewise an avid sailor. Nat had no clear idea of our individual backgrounds or skills, he was beginning right at zero in his first attempt to impart his hard earned knowledge and skills to this collection of unknowns.

At first the layouts on the floor were deceptively simple. Just a four side shape made up of the four dimensions for the chosen sail. Soon enough we had three of these chalked quadrilaterals all down. Then the mysteries began. Nat now showed us how to work into the edges of the sail plan the necessary curvature to create "draft", the belly which becomes an airfoil under pressure from the wind. Nat pinned the chalkline at the tack and then with a simple, graceful movement let it fall in a gentle arc outside the foot line until it dropped across the clew. "That's about right for this sail," he remarked. He went on to do the slightly more complex curve for the luff, with most of the curvature near the tack to get the maximum draft into the lower part of the sail. Well, we then all duplicated his demonstration. Of course it took a number of tries to get an approximation of the smooth, fair curves he laid down, but we had it down in a while.

Then it was roll out the cloth per-

pendicular to the leach, roll it that way, then back this way, trimming close to final marks to conserve expensive dacron. And then the geometry of "broad-seaming" to add more draft, pulling in the seam overlaps towards the edges of the plan to increase their width.

Sewing up seams was done on two production machines, one was Nat's, one was one of Robin's. That one had a hot clutch, to the non-sewer it was, at first no motion at all, then nudge the knee lever a bit and then it was all out, and runaway seam, followed by pulling out the wrong thread. Yet, in time we all got to master these devices, and by mid-week we had each a sail all sewn together, with re-inforcing patches in the corners, tapes for the reef points, and overlapped edge seams so no raw edges showed anywhere. The last part of the week was to be handwork time.

Nat had shepherded us through the layout and sewing, somehow keeping us all going despite the bottleneck of two sewing machines for six seamstress/seamsters. The handwork would not introduce any such scheduling problems, it was everyone for themselves, mostly.

Putting in the various brass grommets at first looked like a simple press in the metal ring in a jig task. But, the major ones at the tack, the peak and the head all were brass rings that were hand sewn in first, with the press fitted sleeve put on after. And then came the clew cringle, the most highly stressed point on the sail. This one was made up from tarred hemp line, we had to unwind a piece of three-strand and then take the single strand and relay it into a tight little donut, which subsequently was then hand sewn into the clew. That one took some doing, there were quite a few deformed little doughnuts laying about the loft along with some played out lengths of hemp, all their original "lay" long gone from repeated frustrated efforts to get that perfect ring Nat made so easily.

The final task was roping the sail, sewing on a length of three strand line that started a foot or so from the tack on the foot, went round the tack, up the luff, then up the head and around the peak onto the leach maybe a foot. That was a long way for the inexperienced hand in the unfamiliar sailmaker's palm to push that big needle with double waxed threads

on it. Especially pushing it through 6 or so layers of dacron at the corners with their re-inforcing patches and tabling.

All pressed on diligently and soon learned of an added complexity. Because the line used for the roping and the sailcloth stretch differing amounts under tension, it was necessary on the luff in particular to pick up a bit of extra cloth with each stitch as one slowly worked along a seemingly endless expanse of white. The idea was to shorten up the luff maybe five or so inches on this particular sail to allow for the percentage of elongation the rope would acquire when hauled up on the halliard.

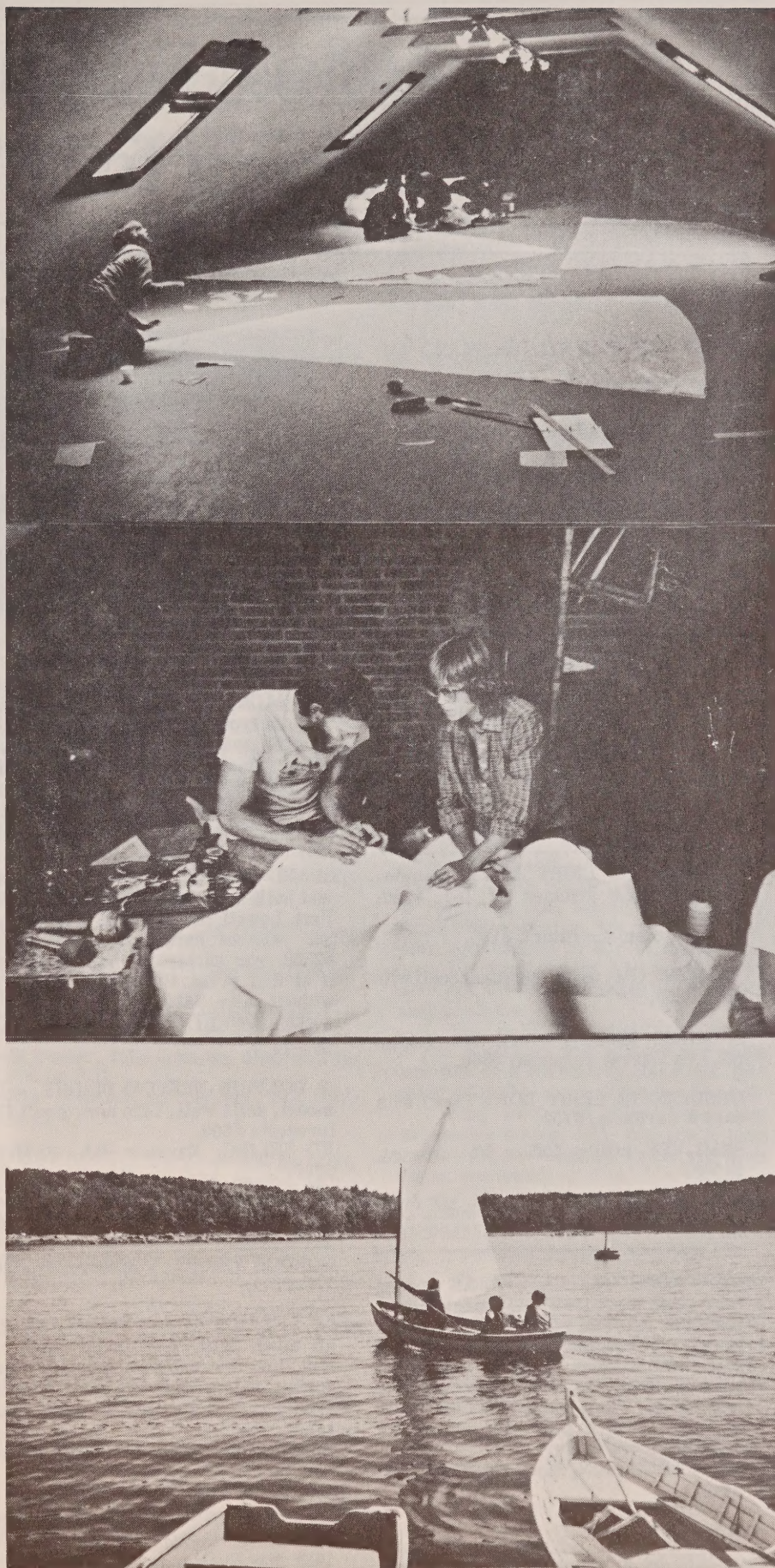
And then there were the rope ends, they couldn't just sort of stop bluntly. They had to taper off, which meant doing something known as a "rat tail". This meant unlaying the three strand at the end a foot or so, then unlaying each of the three strands until it sort of combed out in just fibers, which then were thinned out by scraping with a knife. The thinned out fibers were then rewound into tapering strands, which in turn were re-laid back into a three-strand line, but now with a taper. Just like a rat tail.

Nat really hoped we'd be able to test our sails, and as the week moved along it began to seem a real possibility. By Friday afternoon several sails were done and Saturday morning wrapped up the rest, all six had gone the course. It was off to Joel White's boatyard in Brooklin to test the sails, Joel had offered the loan of two peapods, and Nat had chosen the spritsail design we'd made not only because building it embodied all the basics of sailmaking, but because it would fit Joel's peapods.

There was a 12 to 15 knot breeze, so now we'd find out how we did. The class split up in the two boats, and for three hours on a sunny Saturday afternoon, we alternated one another's sails in short cruises about the harbor. All functioned. Great relief, and high spirits ensued. To be sure there were awkward wrinkles here or there, and no doubt some may have worked better than others, but astute trimming made them all function adequately. And so, Nat Wilson smiled the quiet smile of achievement. A week away from the pressures of building large traditional sails for schooners and yachts, often in cotton, to take on six unknown sailing enthusiasts willing to spend some bucks to get an idea of what sailmaking was all about.

And a sail to take home, too. The sail was not in the price for the class, but we each could buy ours for cost of materials, around \$45 a piece. Everybody did. None of us had a boat the sail would fit right onto. But, I have my 10 foot John Gardner designed plywood pram in the shed now. Maybe a mast step there, a leeboard setup on each gunwale, and a quick simple rudder installation back here, and then . . .

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE 1983 WOODENBOAT SCHOOL AND ALL ITS PROGRAMS? CONTACT PETER ANDERHEGGEN, WOODENBOAT SCHOOL, P.O. BOX 78, BROOKLIN, ME 04616.



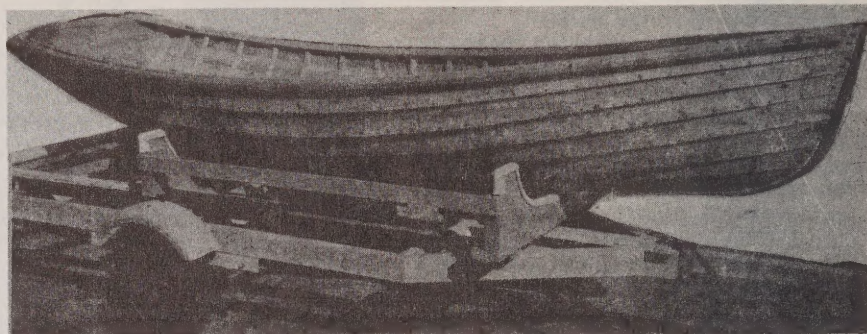
Top: Judy Cernobyl lays out the sailcloth on the loft floor in the early stages of making the sail. Center: Nat shows Judy how to sew in the cringle. Bottom: Test time in one of Joel White's peapods and the sail sets quite nicely.

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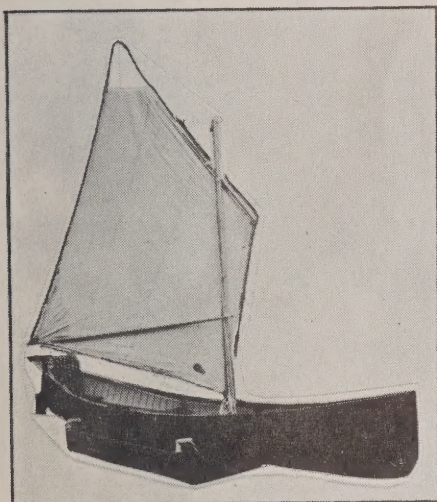
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